

THE DIVISION OF DOMESTIC WORK IN SPAIN: IS UNDOING GENDER POSSIBLE?

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Résumé :

Cette étude présente trente-trois couples espagnols à double revenu, hétérosexuels sans enfants, qui estompent la répartition genrée des tâches ménagères. Nous utilisons le concept de « undoing gender » proposé par Francine M. Deutsch (2007) dans le sens « interactions sociales qui réduisent la différence de genre ». Ces couples issus de milieux socioéconomiques variés ont été interrogés en 2011 dans quatre villes espagnoles. Il ressort de leur discours que les facteurs clés encourageant une répartition des tâches domestiques non conventionnelles sont : les ressources du couple (au sens large), leur disponibilité temporelle, l'aide extérieure dont ils peuvent bénéficier, la représentation qu'ils se font de l'équité, et les attitudes complexes de genre. Quatre éléments explicatifs peuvent être identifiés : leur conviction d'égalité des genres, de partage équitable des responsabilités comme des temps de loisirs, celui de conflit et enfin celui lié à la marchandisation. La manière dont ces couples transforment les rapports de genre illustre les constructions externes, individuelles ou communes qui sont mises en œuvre pour s'entendre sur une division plus égalitaire du travail non rémunéré.

Pour citer ce document : Genre ; Travail domestique ; Étude qualitative.

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Abstract:

This article studies thirty-three dual-income Spanish childless heterosexual couples who were undoing gender in routine domestic work. We understand “undoing gender” as defined by Deutsch (2007): “social interactions that reduce gender difference”. The dual-earner couples came from different socio-economic backgrounds and were interviewed in four different Spanish towns in 2011. The analysis shows that resources in a wide sense, time availability, external help, ideas about fairness, and complex gender attitudes are key interdependent factors that together may form different paths leading to a non-mainstream division of housework. Four paths are identified: the first two are based on beliefs in gender equality and on ideas about fairness equal responsibility and equal leisure; the third is characterized by conflict; and the fourth relies on commodification. The ways in which these couples are undoing gender illustrate the external, individual and couple circumstances spouses succeed to achieve a more gender-equal construction of unpaid work.

Readers wishing to cite this document are asked to use the following form of words:

Gender; Domestic work; Qualitative analysis

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This research received funding from the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (Plan Nacional de I+D, grant CSO2010-17811/SOCl) and from the Spanish Women's Institute (Ref. 43/09). Thanks to Maria José González and Juan Ignacio Fernández for their comments on the manuscript.

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic work is one of the most gendered spheres of social life, and one in which equality seems most difficult to attain. Some couples however manage to establish a non-traditional¹ division of housework. Some feminist scholars have recently pointed out that while research on domestic work has focused on the persistence of gendered patterns, more research is needed on couples who undo gender, because they are a source of change. Such research shed light on the mechanisms that allow couples to overcome traditional conceptions of gender (Deutsch 2007; Risman 2011; Sullivan 2004).

According to the literature, the following factors are associated with more egalitarian divisions of work: high educational attainment; gender egalitarian attitudes; women with greater resources; time availability, and childlessness (Coltrane 2000; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010). Little is known however about the relationship between behavior, ideas and material factors, nor about how couples integrate these into negotiations on the division of work. Qualitative methods have provided valuable insights into undoing gender in domestic work, among other things by identifying postgender couples, for whom gender is not the basis for the division of work (Risman and Johnson-Sumerford 1998), and who are mostly middle class, highly educated and hold gender egalitarian values. In contrast, Deutsch (1998) has shown that non-traditional behavior can be compatible with traditional values if structural conditions require it.

This research provides a different approach to undoing gender by firstly focusing on couples that are undoing gender, in the sense of “social interactions that reduce gender difference” (Deutsch 2007), and, secondly investigating what possible configurations of ideas, resources, and processes may lead to a more egalitarian division of work. This strategy will allow us to uncover different ways of undoing gender. We use a sample of 33 Spanish couples, with diverse socio-economic backgrounds, including unemployed men. In contrast to most other papers, in this study the couples are childless, which allows us to focus specifically on routine domestic work without having to disentangle the interrelations between child care and domestic work.

The structure of the paper is the following. First, we present a brief review of the literature of undoing gender in domestic work. In a second section we describe our sample and how we analyzed the interviews. We then present the results and the possible configurations that lead to undoing gender. Finally we draw some conclusions and derive implications for further research on gender and domestic work.

¹ The term *traditional* with respect to the division of housework may include different realities depending on context and time. We use the opposite term *non-traditional* as a practical shorthand to characterize couples where men share housework with their partners to a significant extent, doing at least 40% of domestic work.

I. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Gender asymmetry in the division of domestic work is a well-known fact among sociologists and feminist scholars, and there is a rich body of literature on its persistence. In contrast to the frequent imbalance, certain couples do achieve a non-traditional distribution of unpaid work. What makes those couples different? According to the literature, there are mainly two sets of micro-level factors that can cause, or at least facilitate such a division: resources, both material and immaterial, and gender constructions.

Economic resources are at least part of the explanation for the division of domestic work (see Coltrane 2000; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010 for reviews): the higher the women's resources relative to their partners', the easier it is to undo gender. Although an important stream of the literature measures resources purely as earnings, other authors have considered that a broader definition of material resources and of time availability may better capture an individual's bargaining power (Cunningham 2007; Botia 2010). A broader definition of resources can include either material assets, such as a dwelling or savings, or immaterial resources such as a longer employment history or a wide social network. Time has also been considered as an immaterial resource, but its effect is the inverse of economic resources, as time at home is a necessary condition to do chores (Blood and Wolfe, 1960).

All of the above mentioned resources are ascribed to one member of the couple, but they can only acquire their bargaining power through social interaction: they need to be recognized by the other person. As power relationships can exist in a latent form (Komter 1989), and negotiations about domestic work are often not explicit, couples may not reach the point of discussing who should do what, but instead one partner may just acknowledge the other partner's power and act accordingly. For couples with non-traditional divisions of domestic work, Wiessman *et al.* (2008) find for the Netherlands that conflicts are exteriorized more often, and that there are explicit negotiations around unpaid work.

Such bargaining, either explicit or implicit, is not developed in a neutral space, but framed by a social context in which there are norms about gender. Men and women have been influenced by socialization processes, and their roles are also constructed and enacted through social interaction, by doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender norms are interiorized to varying degrees and conform to a gender ideology, which according to Hochschild and Machung (1989) is the result of people unconsciously synthesizing certain cultural ideas and also by taking opportunities the context offers. This process can produce ambivalences even if the person has a clear gender ideal (Gerson 2009). These ambivalences may be translated into behaviors that make the achievement of a non-traditional arrangement difficult, for instance, in the form of unconscious gate-keeping behaviors (Allen and Hawkins 1999). Ambivalences also arise when people have to adapt gender ideals to difficult internal or external contexts.

From this background, we can conclude that more egalitarian divisions of housework might be expected in couples where both partners believe in an egalitarian relationship, with relatively weak interiorizations of traditional gender norms, and in equality-friendly social and couple contexts. Gender attitudes, material and immaterial resources, and their interactions seem to play a role in the division of

housework, although it is not yet clear how these factors interact with each other, how they are interpreted by the members of the couple, nor whether any of them is a necessary or sufficient condition to achieve a non-traditional division of domestic work. Would it be possible to achieve equality without similar resources and/or without a belief in gender equality? Under what conditions?

Quantitative methods are ill-equipped to answer these questions, given the importance of the subjective dimensions, the richness of ideas about fairness and the embeddedness of the intervening factors. In addition, they rarely work with couple data and retrospective information on both spouses' job trajectories and family backgrounds. The richness of a qualitative approach to undoing gender has already been shown at the beginning of the 1990s by Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998), who analyzed 15 couples that shared housework on a 60/40 basis and had specific gender attitudes. The authors concluded that in these couples a necessary condition for undoing gender was that women held university degrees and had acquired good earning potential, but also that both spouses had to oppose hegemonic beliefs in essentialist gender differences, which otherwise may have served as justifications for an unequal split of domestic work. Knudsen-Martin and Rankin Mahoney (2005) described some of the processes that helped couples move towards equality, and suggest the existence of *gender legacy* couples, that showed ambivalent characteristics, as they agreed with the idea of an egalitarian division of work but ended up by doing gender. Deutsch (1998) analyzed couples with traditional attitudes that had a non-traditional division of work due to external circumstances.

In this paper, we investigate the interactions of factors that allow couples to achieve a non-traditional division of domestic work by using a different empirical strategy: we do not select couples according to their gender attitudes but instead we analyze couples whose behavior undoes gender, and then investigate what their attitudes and the configurations of their resources are that make their behavior possible.

II. DATA AND METHOD

1) The Original Dataset

This article draws on a research project that interviewed 68 dual income childless couples in four Spanish towns (Barcelona, Madrid, Pamplona and Seville). The original research focused on the transition to parenthood and therefore the couples selected for this dataset were expecting their first child when interviewed. While pregnancy affects the division of domestic work, the information gathered through the interviews refers specifically to the pre-pregnancy period, and therefore we do not expect pregnancy to influence our results. Most couples (53) were contacted through birth preparation courses, which most women attend in Spain and which are free. The researchers presented the project, and asked those who were interested in participating to provide some contact information. In their presentations, researchers avoided the use of the word "gender" and tried to present the project in a neutral fashion, mentioning leisure time, working life and domestic work as some of the topics to be discussed. Some couples (13) were contacted through social networks, and were interviewed by someone they had never met before. Some couples snow-balled the researchers to other couples (2). Respondents were not paid to participate in the

study, but they did receive a gift: either a book or a 50 euro voucher (3) for a department store; the latter was a strategy for reaching couples from a lower socio-economic status. While respondents were given the choice of doing the interviews at home, at university or another place of their choice, most interviews (except 3) took place at the couples' home, which provided information about the context of their lives. The fieldwork was carried out in 2011 by nine different interviewers, eight women and one man, of a similar age group to that of the couples (between 30 and 45 years of age), and all were trained social scientists working at a university or research center.

Interviewers followed a list of topics to be covered in depth. The structure of the interviews was designed to observe the interactions between both members of the couple and individual attitudes, so both partners were interviewed individually to explore personal life course, and then a third interview was held with both members of the couple at the same time to get an impression on couple dynamics (Valentine 1999). For each couple, all three were carried out by the same interviewer. During the individual interviews, respondents were first asked about their education, their family of origin, their working career, their leisure activities and their daily routines. In the couple interviews, respondents were first asked to describe their history as a couple, and how they had adapted to living together in terms of leisure activities and domestic work. After describing the domestic tasks that they performed pre-pregnancy, respondents were asked to reach an agreement about the percentage of domestic chores that each of them did as a "summary measure". Frequently the couples discussed each one's relative contribution to housework, which nuanced previous self-perceptions and sometimes showed latent conflicts. The combined duration of the three interviews varied significantly, from 100 to 180 minutes. The conversations were taped, transcribed and anonymized. At the end of the interview, respondents filled in a brief questionnaire that included basic socio-demographic information, including their income brackets.

Couples were selected according to a non-probability but stratified purposive sampling. Both members of the couple had to be active in the labor market and it was decided that there should be women of different education levels in order to have variation in resources: employment trajectories and earnings. Another criterion was the time availability of the male partner, since in Spain men in the private sector tend to work very long hours. Couples were not selected on their gender ideology or attitudes. In general, it is very unlikely that couples with a high degree of conflict on any topic agreed to be interviewed, so we must take into account that in this type of research we are probably interviewing couples with a more harmonious relationship than average. Despite this, we did observe some conflict and disagreement in the couples studied, and we must take this bias into account when interpreting the results.

2) The Analytic Subsample and Method

To select couples with a non-traditional arrangement from the larger sample of dual-income couples (68), we first turned their own reports on the percentage distributions of domestic work. According to the 2010 Spanish Time Use Survey, childless female spouses aged 18 to 50 performed on average 68 percent of routine housework compared to 32 percent done by male spouses, which means that among childless couples in Spain an asymmetric division of housework still predominates. We considered that couples who

agreed that the woman did up to 60 percent of domestic work and where the man did at least 40 percent qualified as non-mainstream couples in the Spanish context, so this was set as a minimum threshold to select couples for the subsample. Interviewees had also been asked to describe who did what and how they organized routine domestic chores (general cleaning, toilet cleaning, cooking, washing up, laundry, hanging up, ironing and shopping for groceries), which are considered more “feminine” tasks (Coltrane 2000). Sometimes, interviewees added other chores to their description, such as tidying up, caring for a pet, DIY, gardening, etc., but domestic work is based in our analysis on the interviewees accounts of how and who does the routine domestic tasks, as these represent a larger bulk of work and are stereotyped as female. After consistency checks between the detailed descriptions and the percentages provided, the final subsample consisted of 33 couples.

Our discourse analysis was performed by the four authors in a collaborative way, all of them participating in the coding process and in the analysis of the discourses provided by the interviewees. In addition, all of them had also been interviewers. The coding process included multi-person inter-rater reliability checks of coding and interpretation. Both individual and joint interviews were analyzed together, which means we triangulated “his”, “her” and “their” interviews. We studied the 33 couples with a 60/40 housework division in-depth following an “abductive” logic according to Timmermans and Tavory (2012). This means we moved iteratively back and forth between data and theory, discussing our findings within the group, made up of researchers with a diversity of backgrounds (sociology, demography and psychology). The notions about what a fair division of work would be, and the attitudes towards domestic work and gender issues in general were not directly asked in the interviews, but were deduced from the discourses throughout the interviews.

III. RESULTS

The inside workings of the non-mainstream division of domestic chores vary significantly among couples. Some couples try to use specific approaches that foster co-responsibility, such as rotation of tasks – that they later abandoned –, or keeping track of the chores – however small – that each of them does. We also find individualization: each partner doing his/her own laundry, cleaning or cooking. But in almost all cases, the division involves a certain specialization of tasks. Some of the domestic chores are shared by both partners, often the case with shopping for groceries and cleaning the house. Other tasks are more often divided: cooking lunch or dinner, washing the dishes, doing the laundry or ironing clothes are more often assigned to one of the partners. In many cases even if one task is shared by both of them, such as cleaning the house, some specialization tends to be involved: for instance one partner would clean the toilets while the other does the vacuum cleaning. The justification for those divisions are based on personal tastes, personal abilities and sometimes health issues (allergies or backaches influence what one of the partners can do).

How similar are these couples with regard to their backgrounds, resources and time availability? First, they show diverse marital statuses. Second, they are also highly educated: in 29 couples the woman has a college education, and in 17 cases the man does too. However, there are 4 women with a vocational

training level (secretary, hair-dresser, pre-primary teacher, and designer). With respect to education homogamy and women's education level, this sample departs from the general population, because it is skewed towards women with a university degree and because no couples were included where the woman has a lower education than her partner. Thus, even if we find different distributions of resources among these couples, women's educational attainment may be playing a relevant role in their division of work.

Additionally, we have considered the distribution of resources in the couples in a broader sense, considering income categories, but also job stability which is a very relevant issue in the Spanish labor market, career trajectories and perspectives, ownership of the dwelling, and social networks –for instance in cases where one member of the couple moved to the partner's town, leaving his/her own networks behind. If we take into account our broad definition of resources, in these couples women have more bargaining power than men in 16 cases, whereas in 7 cases they have a similar position and in 10 cases women have fewer resources than their partners. We must also take into account that most women in this sample have well established positions in the labor market. Most of them have developed a career and have reached a good position in accordance with their educational attainment and field of studies, and they are satisfied with their situations and committed to their jobs. Six men and two women are unemployed at the time of the interview.

Regarding time availabilities, we have taken into account not only the number of hours respondents worked, but also their schedules and commuting times. Taking this into account, only 10 women have more time availability than their partners, while 16 have less time, and in 7 couples both members have similar availabilities. As summarized in Annex Table 1 there is some evidence in favor of resources and time availability being important factors associated with undoing the gendered division of housework: among our non-mainstream couples we find many women with similar or higher resources in the broad sense than their partners (24), and also many men with similar or more time available than their female partners (24).

In what concerns gender attitudes and beliefs, most spouses show egalitarian attitudes about the domestic sphere, although with some ambivalences. For instance, some respondents agree with the idea of sharing equally, but also with the idea that women are better suited to do some tasks, or that they naturally have higher standards, whereas men seem less capable of "seeing the dust" that needs cleaning. The presence of different standards that men and women consider acceptable for their homes interestingly relates to gender norms and constructions. Higher standards are more often found among women, and can easily lead to performing more chores. In our sample we also found women who have adjusted their standards to avoid falling into that trap; and men who have adjusted their own standards to approach their partners', and also, we find cases where women have lower standards than men.

Depending on the combination and articulation of the factors emerging from the discourse analysis as relevant for explaining these couples' equal sharing – time availability, resources in the broad sense, individual attitudes, conflicts about standards and degree of outsourcing –, we identify four different types of situations that could produce a non-traditional arrangement for domestic chores.

1) Egalitarian Attitudes Towards Domestic Work (15 couples)

The first and most frequent path to reach a non-traditional distribution of domestic work is made up of women and men who express the belief that tasks should be shared, irrespective of other time constraints. Paid and unpaid work are considered to be two different areas, and a 50/50 division of domestic work is considered fair. These couples are close to postgender couples as described by Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998), although in some couples the woman expressed ambivalent gender attitudes, while the man's beliefs were stated more clearly. Only five couples in this group have external help to do housework, about two hours a week, to clean the house. Although the lines of argumentation found in these couples would lead us to expect a non-traditional distribution of housework even if their schedules or resources changed, for the majority of couples in this group (9), resources were balanced and for the remaining six time availability is also similar for both members of the couple, which makes it easier to achieve a non-traditional arrangement.

Federico and Fabiola are an example of these couples, that can be viewed as an outcome of a favorable configuration of resources, time and attitudes. They both have completed college studies, although Fabiola has a master's degree. They both have jobs that corresponded to their qualifications, and although they mention that he used to earn slightly more than her, they are in the same income bracket in our questionnaire. Federico has a fixed-term contract but he considers his situation to be quite stable, whereas Fabiola has a long-term contract but feels that she could soon be fired as a consequence of her company's financial problems related to the economic crisis. They are owners of the dwelling. Taking all these factors into account, we consider their resources to be similar. Concerning time availability, they both have a good working schedule, but Federico is in a better position because he always arrives home early by Spanish standards (before 4 p.m.), whereas Fabiola has to work some afternoons.

They share the domestic work equally, with Fabiola in charge of organizing most of it. They clean the apartment once a week; she does the kitchen and toilets, he does the rest of the house. Federico prepares the meals, as they have lunch and dinner at home most days, and Fabiola does the ironing. Shopping for groceries is a task they try to do together once or twice a week. They have had some conflicts about domestic work due to different standards, but they talked about them openly, as they both agree that housework has to be shared.

FEDERICO (man): "... It has always been clear for us that the house belongs to both of us, and that we are both responsible for everything too, although there are some things I am worse at and some things I am better at... (...)

FABIOLA (woman): I would not allow him to be a male chauvinist or not to do any of the domestic work. I would not let him, but well, he does not even think of it."

Among these couples with egalitarian attitudes and balanced resources, we find two couples where women show some ambivalences, whereas their partners are more clearly egalitarian in their attitudes towards domestic chores. In both cases he is unemployed and actually performs more domestic chores than she does. These women express the need and desire for an equal and co-responsible sharing of housework, and they acknowledge their partners' involvement in the domestic sphere, but at the same time they refer to some tasks as being better performed by women than men, or to standards that the partner is unable to comply with.

In this first path towards a non-traditional division we also find a subset of couples where the relative distribution of resources and of time availability might have played against a non-traditional division of housework. These couples are very heterogeneous, the women's job trajectories also vary, but in general they have a stable position in the labor market and a career that is congruent with their qualifications. In all these cases, the educational attainment of both partners is similar, although women earn less and most of them work fewer hours than their partners. According to our analysis, this mode of equal sharing could be understood as the result of these women being partnered to men with egalitarian attitudes. –They hold egalitarian attitudes but find themselves in a situation where resources and time-availability theories would predict a more traditional outcome–. The existence of this subset of couples is very interesting, as it points at the importance of attitudes in shaping the division of domestic work, and qualifies the role of economic resources and time availability.

Rebeca and Roberto are a good example of these couples. They are both very focused on their jobs, but to have time for themselves as a couple, as well as time for their individual leisure activities, is very important to them. Rebeca has a better schedule than Roberto and spends more time at home, but she does not do more chores as a result. Before meeting her current partner, Rebeca was in a relationship with a man who was not prepared to get involved in domestic chores. In her relationship with Roberto, both of them decided to share things equally, and tried the strategy of rotating tasks, which they later abandoned to specialize in different chores. Roberto feels the need to show Rebeca that he is a suitable partner and that he is able to be co-responsible for domestic work, so much so, that Rebeca is ready to be flexible with their arrangement and to occasionally increase her share of the chores, although Roberto prefers her not to do so.

REBECA (woman): "Sometimes I tell him: do you want me to iron that shirt for you? Like, if he has arrived home really tired and has no shirts left. And he says: "no". He is stubborn like that, he thinks that if the shirt is ironed for him, then he will be less... He has to do everything himself, in that sense he is a bit extreme. It is not that I think that, because I am a woman I should do the ironing, in fact I hate doing the ironing..."

Men's attitudes towards gender norms thus seem to play an important role in this first category of our typology. Through our interviews we gain some insight into the origin of attitudes, as they provide

information about the family of origin and previous life experiences. Many men with egalitarian attitudes concerning housework are used to performing a large range of domestic chores since they were children or after, either because they experienced their parents' divorce and thus participated more than usual in housework, or because they lived alone for some time and were the person solely responsible for domestic work. Experiencing the divorce of their parents, sometimes in both families of origin and sometimes only in the men's families, seems to play an important role in current relationships. In addition to, or because of, these personal non-traditional socialization experiences, some of them also express egalitarian gender attitudes, such as for instance Sergio:

SERGIO (man): "I grew up in a family where domestic chores have always been shared, and since I was a child, my mother has always taken charge of educating me to do housework. I mean, since I was a child I have done my bedroom, made my bed, helped at home. At home, it was never a case of "this is for men, that is for women", as was the case in other places I know. A different issue is that I am lazy, and sometimes I find it (domestic work) difficult, like everyone else".

Another element related to egalitarian gender attitudes is linked to men perceiving their job as instrumental, or emphasizing the importance of taking care of their partner and of the relationship. For instance, César expresses both attitudes simultaneously when speaking about his ideal for the near future:

CÉSAR (man): "I would like to work less, earn less, live a better life (...). And as for organization, that the chores were divided more or less at fifty percent (...). I would like to leave the issues of work aside, work is work and that's it (...). What good is it to work and make money if your relationship is breaking down?"

In some cases, egalitarian attitudes towards housework do not derive from socialization or the need to take care of oneself, but from the relationship with the partner and the willingness to adapt to her needs and make the relationship work. Leo adapted to the standards and ways of doing housework of his spouse, when he started living in her apartment after an intense courtship.

LUIISA (woman): "He has adapted to my ways, and that is what I have been saying, that I am a bit fussier than the average about cleanliness and orderliness, but without being excessive. And he has had no trouble adapting, no problem at all.

LEO (man): Really, honestly, it is love. We can try to go around it but it is because I love you and I adapt to your ways because I want to be with you."

To sum up, in this first type we mostly find couples with similar resources and time availability, but also cases where those resources are imbalanced and where the basis for an at least 60/40 division of housework is rooted in the egalitarian attitudes towards the division of domestic work of both members of the couple. Men's attitudes seem to be especially relevant, and are often associated with former experiences in domestic work acquired in the family of origin, with other partners, or by living alone.

2) A Fair Distribution of Leisure Time (7 couples)

These couples express the idea that housework should be shared and need not be gendered, but their main argument is that it would not be fair if one member of the couple enjoyed more leisure time than the other. For these couples, housework is not clearly separated from paid work, as they understand that the time spent on domestic work depends on the time spent on paid work. If we observed a non-traditional arrangement in these couples when they were interviewed, it was because men did spend more time at home and had more time availability than their partners; for instance some of them were unemployed and did most of the domestic work during that period when they had no paid job. Related to this, we find that women in this group have similar or higher resources than men, and only in one case did they benefit from external help.

The need to compensate for the time the other member of the couple spent working becomes even more salient when one of the partners is unemployed. This was the case of Angel, who used to share domestic work with his partner by doing 40 percent before losing his job. Angel's partner is in favor of an egalitarian division of domestic tasks, although she is ready to be flexible depending on time constraints. At the time of the interview, Angel has been unemployed for three months and started doing almost everything around the house himself. Angel was used to doing domestic chores in his family of origin, although he had not been very involved in them when he was working because of a demanding work schedule.

ANGEL (man): "... When I was laid off, I saw that she was working, and I was unemployed, and I thought: it makes sense that I should do it (domestic work). We could say that I do not see it as my private time, but that if I am the one who is not working, then I am the one who does everything (at home), do you understand?"

The explicit basis for the division in these cases is not gender equality, but fairness: both members of the couple should be allowed similar amounts of free time. Time spent together is highly valued, but we find many couples where it is also important to have time for individual activities. If the working schedules favor a balanced presence at home, fairness as a basis for the division of unpaid work results in equal arrangements. But it can lead to different arrangements if time schedules change. Indeed, in most of these

couples we find references to previous moments in the partnership when schedules and the division of housework were different. At a different moment in their lives, we could have classified these cases as having a more asymmetric housework division, and partners would have been satisfied with it, despite their egalitarian attitudes.

These couples agree on egalitarian gender values: men in this group do not reject doing domestic chores, nor do women try to do more themselves, but dividing the domestic chores is not a gender issue but a time issue. In this sense these couples resemble postgender couples, but their ideas of fairness differ from those in the first group.

3) Pushing and Pulling (7 couples)

In this group the division of tasks is always closer to 60-40 percent, with women doing the greater share. In these couples, women would prefer a 50-50 arrangement, and have tried to get their partners involved in such a division, but the men show a more passive or confrontational attitude. Women in this group have a good bargaining power position, as in all cases their resources are similar or superior to their partners', so they are in a good position to try to mobilize their male counterparts. To solve the contradiction between their attitudes and their partners' behavior, some women raise the question and seek an agreement to share more equally. This is the case of Mario and Maria. They both went to college, and earn similar wages. Maria has a stable position and a good working schedule, whereas Mario works in a job with interesting career prospects and has less time off. Also, Mario usually does some leisure activities on his own, which takes up a considerable part of his free time. As a result, at the beginning of their relationship, when Mario moved into her dwelling, Maria took on most of the domestic work.

MARIA (woman): "...until one day I staged a coup d'état and I told him that the food did not get into the fridge alone, and that we had to find the time to get everything done" (...)

MARIO (man): "One day she got mad at me and we changed the routines (...). I do not like it (cleaning the toilet), and I do not like doing the laundry either, it is a stupid thing, but I don't (like it)".

Mario agreed to give up some of his leisure time in order to get more involved in domestic work, even if Maria still does a greater share than her partner and is mostly responsible for organizing it. If she had not voiced her discontent, it is most likely that the division would have remained more traditional. In most cases in this group, women did not voice their discontent as Maria did, and they are resigned to doing a greater share than their partners, as an equilibrium is reached that is better than the default mainstream arrangement. Also, some women have to relax their standards and avoid gate-keeping attitudes to maintain the desired "almost egalitarian" division, because their partners are not ready to comply with their higher standards. This is the case of Isabel and Israel. In this couple, Israel has more time availability than his wife,

but he is more relaxed concerning housework. Isabel is aware of her tendency to take on more tasks, simply because she finds it easy to do them or because she thinks more frequently of the things that need to be done. She knows that if she lets herself do more, her partner will stop doing certain tasks, and eventually everything will fall on her. So she proposes to her partner that each of them should do their own laundry and cooking, as if they were living apart, and to outsource cleaning the house. Ismael agrees.

“ISABEL (woman): The problem is... I do not find it hard to do the laundry, and so I do the laundry once a week or whenever. And you (to her partner), you do find it hard, so if I do not find it hard eventually I will always do the laundry, with everyone's clothes, and you end up never doing the laundry. So each of us should do their own, and that's it.

ISRAEL (man): I find that better, more pragmatic.”

In the two examples given above, the men's resistance is mild, but we also find three couples where the partners' attitudes are more conflicting. Women in these three cases are not ready to be flexible on certain standards, and they also want a non-traditional division of domestic work. On the other hand, their partners show a lower commitment to the idea of shared housework, or directly try to resist it. In these more problematic cases we find homogenous resources and time availabilities that favor a non-traditional arrangement, but such an arrangement is punctuated by constant conflict. Taking on domestic help emerged as a way to resolve the conflict and to facilitate a more equal share. Gender norms are present in these couples, not so much through attitudes, which are egalitarian in most cases, but through a set of expectations, standards and strategies.

This is the case for Rosa and Rafael. Rosa has a college education and is very committed to her career, a high profile job requiring very long hours. Her partner has a job that he enjoys and suits his qualifications, for which he earns considerably less than Rosa, and which also leaves him a lot of free time. Rosa would like to have an egalitarian arrangement for domestic work, but Rafael perceives that she also has high standards for domestic work and clear ideas about when and how it should be done. Rafael shows very egalitarian attitudes concerning family life, supported his wife's career, and does not oppose the idea of an equal distribution of work, but he has more relaxed standards concerning domestic chores and disagrees with “her way” of doing them, employing the strategy of “reducing needs” or “waiting to be asked” (Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Gerson 2009). The division of domestic work has always been a source of conflict for this couple, and they discuss it quite openly.

For Rosa and Rafael, the ultimate conflict is not about equality but about standards. Rosa expects her partner to have everything ready by the time she gets home from work, because that is what she would do if she was the one to arrive earlier. But Rafael does not feel the same need to have everything clean, and so he spends his free time doing something else. Rosa feels frustrated because her partner does not change his behavior.

I: "And when you started living together, did you talk about how to organize domestic work?"

RAFAEL (man): No, we have never talked about it

ROSA (woman): No, but yes, it has always been a cause of fights (laughs)

RAFAEL: A bit, yes

ROSA: Because each of us has a different idea, a different idea of cleanliness. And it depends on how you were used to living in your home, and maybe I think it is necessary to clean the bathroom and he doesn't... Well, that was when we decided: let's stop fighting, let's hire someone and forget about it"

Rosa and Rafael do not find a way to negotiate around these issues, and ultimately decide to externalize domestic work, which in their case means that a woman come once a week to clean the house for a couple of hours, leaving the couple with fewer tasks. They distribute these tasks more easily between them: he cooks the meals because he arrives earlier, and is mostly responsible for the shopping too, and the laundry is done when the laundry basket is full, by either of them.

This type shows that having similar resources, time availabilities and sharing egalitarian beliefs towards housework, which is a favorable configuration for an equitable housework division, do not automatically lead to such an outcome. Elements of gender legacy (Knudson-Martin & Rankin Mahoney, 2005) are present in these couples: there are gendered standards and ways of doing, and some men adhere in theory to egalitarian beliefs but in practice find it difficult to give up male privilege. So, in this type women need to be pushing constantly, which means that conflict is latent on many occasions and the attained equal-share equilibrium is fragile.

3) Domestic Work as a Commodity (4 couples)

The last mode of achieving a somewhat equal sharing of housework is found among couples in which both partners earn high incomes (a net monthly household income higher than €4,500) and who externalize a large part of their housework. These couples pay a person (always a woman) to do the cleaning, ironing, etc.: once a week for many hours, or several days a week for fewer hours per day. Outsourcing is here more important than in other couples, where external help does not exceed three hours a week. As a result, for couples in this group, the amount of remaining housework is small and more easily shared. Domestic work is considered cumbersome, and treated as a commodity: externalizing most of it makes life easier and frees up time for other activities. Gender attitudes are not clear in this group, and we also find variation among women's positions relative to their partners' regarding resources and time

availability, but all women shared relatively high net incomes in comparison to average female incomes in Spain.

This was the case for Camilo and Tania. They are both college educated and have jobs that were congruent with their qualifications, with Camilo earning more than Tania. Although at the time of the interview Tania has more time availability and flexibility than her spouse, it has not always been that way, as the couple used to have very demanding schedules. Both Tania and Camilo are also involved in several leisure activities. Since they are living together, they have had domestic help, increasing the amount of hours when they moved to a bigger house. The woman who works for them was in charge of cleaning the house, kitchen and bathrooms, as well as ironing clothes. The remaining domestic work is shared: Tania is in charge of preparing meals because she enjoys cooking, and Camilo does the laundry and gardening. Both of them find that, in general, domestic work is annoying and prefer to outsource it, as they do with other chores:

“I: Would you say that it is important for you that it does not take a lot of time to do the housework?

CAMILO (man): Yes, because if I thought that it was too much time, I would feel uncomfortable.

TANIA (woman): Well, from the beginning we decided that our free time was precious, so rather than spending our free time doing things that we don't like, we prefer to pay (...). Even for other things that may take up some time, we prefer to pay and spend that time together (...). Like for instance, assembling furniture (...). It is not worth it, we prefer to spend the money on that rather than other things, and then we get ten free hours that we would not have otherwise, instead of assembling, re-assembling, and spending two days at home, not being able to go out, and feeling overwhelmed.”

For Tania and Camilo, housework was not different from other services that can be externalized. If they did not have the resources to externalize most of the domestic chores, they would need to negotiate the division, and conflicts might ensue, but their economic position has always allowed them to avoid that. In this type the configuration of resources, time availability, gender attitudes and latent conflict with respect to housework is rather heterogeneous, which means that the uniting factor is the capacity to outsource a large amount of housework.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has analyzed 33 Spanish couples that undo gender in routine domestic work. We have used “undoing gender” as defined by Deutsch (2007): social interactions that reduce gender difference. Our results show that it is possible to undo gender even if partners do not have similar resources, or even if one partner resists or does not care much about gender equality. In these couples, the non-traditional division has to be explained as the outcome of different configurations of bargaining power, time availability and ideas about gender equality and distributive fairness. There are several possible combinations of factors that facilitate a non-mainstream division of housework among these childless couples.

For most of them a preference for a non-traditional 50/50 arrangement seems to be the basis for the division; for a second group egalitarian ideas are complemented by time availability to define a fair division; for a third group the non-traditional division is unstable and elements of gender legacy are present through gendered standards and strategies; and for a fourth group equality was possible thanks to a high level of outsourcing and mixed gender attitudes. Most of the couples analyzed have a distribution of resources – understood in a broad sense- that favors equality. This might lead us to think that balanced resources are a pre-condition for undoing gender, as suggested by Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998), but this result must be nuanced in several ways. Couples do not mention resources as a factor that determines their negotiations, which means that, if resources played a role in their decision making processes, they did so in the form of latent bargaining power, but not explicitly. Furthermore, resources are imbalanced for one group of couples, but undoing gender was still possible thanks to the partners' commitment to a non-traditional arrangement. Finally, in all couples we studied women are at least as educated as their partners.

Most interviewees show egalitarian gender attitudes, although consistency with these ideas is not easy to maintain due to the presence of gender ambivalences in many respondents, and we find that ambivalences were more clearly manifest around gendered standards. Women often have higher standards than men concerning housework, and these lead them to do more, or to a conflict with their partners, that is difficult to resolve. The availability of domestic service in Spain helps couples resolve these conflicts, or to skip negotiations about domestic work altogether, but external help is always provided by women, which also has an effect on gender inequalities at the social level.

Our analysis shows that it is possible to undo gender through different configurations of factors, albeit with several limitations. Although the sample is quite diverse, we have few couples from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This may mean that it is more difficult for these couples to achieve equality, or that they preferred not to participate in a research project. The interviews discussed mostly routine domestic work, but we can not systematically analyze the organization and planning of tasks. This third shift could be still gendered even in couples where routine domestic work is divided equally, and more research is needed on the attribution of this invisible task. We also need to better understand the implicit mechanisms through which resources confer power in couples' negotiations. It may be that resources are already taken into account in couple formation, and perhaps men with non-traditional gender attitudes are much more likely to seek a relationship with relatively empowered women.

Table 1

Subsample of Non-Traditional Couples (n=33) (Definitions in text or below)

Names Wife Husband	Education level	Type of Job	Family income	Relative Resources	Available Time	Married	Out- sourcing
<i>First Type “Egalitarian Attitudes” (n=15)</i>							
Sara Sergio	University University	Long-term Fix-term	Middle	Similar	She less	Yes	No
Elena Enrique	University Vocational	Fix-term Long-term	Middle	She more	She less	No	No
Delia David	University University	Fix-term Jobless	Middle	She more	She less	Yes	No
Julia Javier	University University	Jobless Long- term	Middle	She more	She more	Yes	Yes
Fabiola Federico	University University	Long-term Fix-term	Middle	Similar	She less	No	No
Karina Karlos	University Vocational	Long term Jobless	High	Similar	She less	Yes	Yes
Juana Javier	Vocational Primary	Fix-term Jobless	Low	She more	She less	Yes	No
Mar Rogelio	University Secondary	Long-term Free-lance	Middle	She more	She more	No	Yes
Gema Gabriel	University Vocational	Fix-term Jobless	Low	She more	She less	No	No
Noemi Abel	Vocational Primary	Long-term Long-term	Low	She less	She less	No	No
Rebeca Roberto	University University	Long-term Long-term	High	She less	She more	Yes	Yes
Caro César	University University	Free-lance Fix-term	Low	She less	She more	No	No

Luisa Leo	Vocational Vocational	Long-term Free-lance	Middle	She less	She less	No	No
Alba	University	Long-term	Middle	She less	Similar	Yes	Yes
Andrés	University	Long-term	Middle	She less	Similar	Yes	Yes
Begoña	University	Jobless Long-term	Middle	She less	She more	Yes	No
Blas	Vocational	term	Middle	She less	She more	Yes	No

Second Type “Equalizing Leisure Time” (n=7)

Felisa	Vocational	Free-lance	Middle	Similar	She less	Yes	No
Fermín	Vocational	Long-term	Middle	Similar	She less	Yes	No
Eva Eloy	University	Long-term	Middle	She more	She less	Yes	No
	University	Fix-term	Middle	She more	She less	Yes	No
Ana Ángel	University	Long-term	Middle	Similar	She less	No	No
	Univesity	Job-less	Middle	Similar	She less	No	No
Marta	University	Fix-term	Middle	She more	She less	No	Yes
Miguel	University	Free-lance	Middle	She more	She less	No	Yes
Verónica	University	Long-term	Low	She more	She less	Yes	No
Víctor	Vocational	Job-less	Low	She more	She less	Yes	No
Conchi	University	Long-term	Middle	She more	She less	Yes	No
Carlos	University	Fix-term	Middle	She more	She less	Yes	No
Fátima	University	Fix-term	Middle	She more	She less	Yes	No
Ferrán	Primary	Long-term	Middle	She more	She less	Yes	No

Third Type “Pushing and Pulling” (n=7)

Olga	University	Long-term	Middle	She more	Similar	Yes	No
Oscar	Vocational	Long-term	Middle	She more	Similar	Yes	No
Laura	University	Long-term	High	Similar	Similar	Yes	Yes
Luis	University	Long-term	High	Similar	Similar	Yes	Yes
Rosa	University	Fix-tern Long-term	High	She more	She less	No	Yes
Rafael	Vocational	term	High	She more	She less	No	Yes
María	University	Long-term	Middle	Similar	She more	Yes	No
Mario	University	Long-term	Middle	Similar	She more	Yes	No

Patricia	University	Long-term	Middle	Similar	She less	No	No
Pablo	University	Long-term					
Mara	University	Long-term	Middle	She more	She more	No	No
Mauro	Secondary	Long-term					
Isabel	University	Long-term	Middle	She more	She less	No	Yes
Israel	Vocational	Free-lance					

Fourth type “Domestic Work as a Commodity” (n=4)

Sara	University	Long-term	High	She less	She less	Yes	Yes
Samuel	University	Entrepreneur					
Teresa	University	Long-term	High	She more	Similar	Yes	Yes
Tomás	Secondary	Long-term					
Mireia	University	Long-term	High	She less	She more	No	Yes
Alberto	University	Long-term					
Tania	University	Long-term	High	She less	She more	No	Yes
Camilo	University	Long-term					

Note: Household income intervals: Low is up to 2,799 €, Middle is up to 3,999 €, and High is from 4,000 € upwards. Educational level: Vocational means Vocational Training.

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